

Alexander Stitt House  
Main Street  
Alexandria  
Huntingdon County  
Pennsylvania

HABS NO. PA-5396

HABS  
PA,  
31-ALEX,  
27-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historical American Building Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ALEXANDER STITT HOUSE

HABS No. PA-5396

Location: The Alexander Stitt house is located on the north side of Main Street, two lots west of Hartslog Street, Alexandria, Porter Township, Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania.

Present Owner: Marion Neff Baker.

Present Use: Single-family dwelling.

Significance: The Alexander Stitt House on Main Street, despite various additions and reworkings over the years, represents an imposing frame dwelling highlighted by Federal ornamental features, it was owned for nearly a half-century during the canal era by a local tanner.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: ca. 1838-39.
2. Original and subsequent owners: The Alexander Stitt House sits on lot No. 161, which fronts 50' on the north side of Main Street, and extends to the rear 202' to an alley.

The following is an incomplete chain of title to the land on which the structure stands. Reference is to the Recorder of Deeds Office of the County of Huntingdon, Pennsylvania.

1837-38 In 1838 Alexander Stitt was taxed for a lot valued at \$150; a year later he was taxed for a house and lot worth \$800, according to tax records. Stitt may have bought the lot as early as 1837 (Harshbarger, notes), according to an unspecific 1837 deed.

1883 Deed January 31, 1883, recorded in Volume Z6, Page 185.  
Alexander Stitt (John D. Dorris, administrator)  
TO  
Letitia Harnish.

1926 Deed April 3, 1926, recorded in Volume Z6, Page 199.  
Letitia Harnish  
TO  
Walter K. Harnish.

1929 Deed April 22, 1929, recorded in Volume H7, Page 117.  
Walter K. and Eleanor H. Harnish

HABS  
PA  
31-ALEX  
27-

TO  
Letitia H. Neff.

1934 Deed December 3, 1934, recorded in Volume N7, Page 288.  
Letitia H. Neff  
TO  
Edith and Marion Neff.

4. Original plans and construction: No original plans or drawings have been located. An early, undated photograph shows a white picket fence surrounding the then-vacant corner lot and the Stitt house. The house was originally a side-hall plan with a three-bay front facade. Federal-style details include the front door on the easternmost bay. The east wall was blind except for two small attic windows. The original chimney was on the east gable end.

The double porch with stairs from the west existed at the time the photograph was taken, as did a front porch with a shed roof and north ell extension (without a porch).

5. Alterations and additions: A modern exterior brick chimney has been added to the east wall, north of the ridge.

The one-story frame addition at the west end, which is listed in tax records as having served as a doctor's office, was probably erected between 1883 and 1906, when Dr. Tobias Harnish may have lived in the house. The Victorian gabled dormers on three sides of the addition support this theory.

- B. Historical Context: At age 50, Alexander Stitt is identified in the 1850 census as a tanner. He appears under the same heading in the 1860 census, but in 1870 and 1880 lists he is retired. According to Harshbarger, Stitt's father was a joiner who emigrated from Ireland. The Stitts and the Lytles operated a tannery on the hill by the canal lock, essentially between their respective lots. This is almost surely the tannery where Alexander worked. The Stitts were one of Alexandria's most prosperous families; he was elected to serve as a town burgess in 1870.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The house features late Federal styling in details such as delicate returning eaves, corner boards, and cornice, as well as doorway treatments, against a basically plain frame mass. The Victorian dormers and steeply pitched roof of the later addition indicate ongoing changes to the structure.
2. Condition of the fabric: Good.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The main mass is 29' x 34'; the north gable end is 22' wide and extends 64' to the west front of the house. It extends 20' to the inside corner of the ell on the northeast corner of the building, and features a porch. The frame addition, southwest corner of the south wall, is 12' x 25'.
2. Foundations: Stone.
3. Wall construction: Frame with horizontal siding.
4. Structural system, framing: Frame.
5. Porches: A single-story, dropped-roof porch shelters the center door on the two-story north gable end. A double porch, 7' x 18', wraps around the inside of the ell. There are two wooden pilasters, as well as a simple balustrade and squared-off balusters. The front porch consists of a roofless brick landing surrounded by an iron railing, accessed from the east by four brick treads.
6. Chimneys: An interior brick chimney is located on the west slope of the north ell. There is a second, exterior, brick chimney on the east gable end.
7. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The front door features Federal styling: flanking four-light sidelights and a seven-light transom. The decorative crown rises approximately 1' above the door casing, framed by flanking pilasters. A wooden door is located above the second story above the porch roof on the north gable end. The wooden door on the south facade of the west addition is glazed with a single boxed transom. Doors in the southernmost two bays of both stories, in the recessed northeast section of the house, are sheltered by the porch roof.
  - b. Windows: Each window bay in the main mass contains one-over-one light sash set on a wooden sill, under a Federal lintel.

The west addition features the same one-over-one sash, but with far more elaborate hoods: Four-part stepped wood projections with interior rows of dentil-like moldings. The dormer windows are one-over-one-light sash.

The east wall is blank except for two small two-over-two-light attic windows that flank the chimney. The one-bay north section contains a six-over-six-light sash above the second-story door.

The shutter hardware is extant, as are the original shutters on the south facade of the main block: they are typically two-paneled wood on the first-floor, louvered on the second.
8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The main block has a side-gabled roof with shallow returning eaves. The western addition is hipped, with gables on the south, west, and north. The north-ell roof is dropped. The roof is covered with asphalt shingles.
- b. Cornice: Wooden box cornice.
- c. Dormers: A sunrise motif is carved into the western gabled dormer, under the eaves. The south and north gables feature smaller motifs carved onto a smaller projecting triangle of wood. The gable ends of the dormers have returning eaves.

D. Site:

- 1. General setting: The Alexander Stitt House is on Main Street. The bank building is located across the street to the east; two lots east of the house, across Hartslog Street, is the Memorial Public Library. An alley runs along the property's north border; houses border its east and west flanks.
- 2. Outbuildings: A small frame shed with a metal roof occupies the back lot by the alley.
- 3. Landscaping, enclosures: A large garden takes up most of the back yard in the north section of the lot.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Old views (in Hartslog Heritage, 69 and 94). There is an early, undated, photograph in the Alexandria museum's collection.

B. Primary and unpublished sources:

Porter Township tax records, 1819 to 1859, Huntingdon County Historical Society.

Alexandria Borough tax records, 1859 to 1873, Huntingdon County Historical Society and Huntingdon County Courthouse.

Huntingdon County Deed Books and Probate Records, Huntingdon County Courthouse, Huntingdon, Pennsylvania.

Huntingdon County Tax Map -- Alexandria, 01-01-39.

Huntingdon County Historical Society survey sheets.

C. Secondary and published sources:

Africa, J. Simpson. History of Huntingdon and Blair Counties, Pennsylvania.  
Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1883.

Harshbarger, Jean P., Nancy R. Taylor, Sara H. Zabriskie, and F.R. Zabriskie. Hartslog Heritage. State College, Pennsylvania: K-B Offset printing, Inc.

#### PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was conducted by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record in cooperation with the America's Industrial Heritage Project under the directorship of Randy Cooley; AIHP is an undertaking of the National Park Service, based in Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania. Recorded under the direction of Robert J. Kapsch, chief of HABS/HAER, the project was completed during summer 1988 at the HABS field office in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Project leader was Alison K. Hoagland, senior HABS historian; field supervisor was Dorothy Burlingame, University of Vermont; project historian, Karen Genskow, Sangamon State University. Large-format photography is by David Ames. Editing of the final report was done by Sara Amy Leach, HABS historian.

This report was completed as part of a larger project documenting two canal towns--Saltsburg, on the Western Division of the Pennsylvania Mainline Canal, and Alexandria, on the Juniata Division--flanking the Allegheny Divide. Twenty-one reports on other buildings in Alexandria, an overview history of Alexandria (HABS No. PA-5407), and of canal town development in Pennsylvania (HABS No. PA-5666) are part of the HABS/HAER collection. Twenty-two reports on buildings in Saltsburg (Indiana County) and an overview history of Saltsburg (HABS No. PA-5438) are also available. Results of the project were published as Two Historic Pennsylvania Canal Towns: Alexandria and Saltsburg, Sara Amy Leach, editor (Washington, DC: Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record, National Park Service, March 1989).